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# A CHRISTMAS EVE FAMILY STORY

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*A*  
CHRISTMAS EVE  
*Family Story*



*Boston: Mdccciv*



*Number*

THE RIVERSIDE PRESS

# CHRISTMAS EVE

1904

*Charles Dalton*

*Mrs. Charles Dalton*

*Major Henry Dalton*

*Mrs. Henry Dalton*

*Mrs. Frank Morison*

*Harry Dalton*

*Elsie Dalton*

*Isabel Morison*

*Philip Dalton*

*Mrs. Philip Dalton*

*Alford Cooley*

*Mrs. Alford Cooley*

*Alice Dalton*

*McGregor Morison*

*Ellen Dalton*

*Rogers Rich*





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1904

**O**N last Christmas night, as you sat around this dinner table, I introduced you, in '*A Wintersnight Tale*,' to some of your early maternal ancestry, yeomen, of Chelmsford, of just two hundred and fifty years ago, in the time of Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England, and of Louis XIV, King of France.

I now present you to your paternal great-great-grandfather, Captain James Dalton, mariner and merchant, of Boston (then a town of about thirteen thousand persons), who was born one hundred and eighty-six years ago, in the reign of George the First, King of England, was fourteen years old when Washington was born, and fifty-one when Napoleon first opened his eyes.

You are, therefore, by inheritance, both farmers and sailors.

The earliest record we have of James is in a

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*manuscript book of over seventy pages of foolscap, containing elaborate diagrams and calculations in geometry, trigonometry and navigation, including astronomical problems, the finding of latitude and longitude, Mercator's sailings, currents, tides, etc., in his own handwriting, entitled*

### JAMES DALTON—HIS BOOK

*August 16, 1736.*

*You can see this old yellow manuscript in the library.*

*I think you will agree with me that it is a creditable production for a lad of eighteen, containing, as it probably does, a record of the science of navigation as known and practiced at the time.*

*Where he was educated or who his masters were does not appear. He certainly did not go to Harvard. Probably his schooling was the same as that of other boys of his day destined to a business life, and limited to the few elementary text-books of the period. His keen pursuit of the abstruse science of*

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*mathematics as applied to navigation was due, very likely, to his ambition to prepare himself for what was then the most adventurous of careers, that of a sailor on the high seas. He was both tutor and pupil. Such enterprising spirits set their own pace and leave the pedagogue behind.*

*The quality of the teacher is of minor consequence to such a mind as that of your uncle, Doctor John. He quickly got beyond his masters. The classics became with him almost as familiar as his mother tongue. He soon passed the limits of the class books. He cultivated his love for the ancient and modern languages throughout his life. His use of English as an author, in his public addresses, in his lecture room and in conversation, was unsurpassed for elegance, purity and accuracy. He not only arrived, early in his professional life, among the first living authorities on human physiology, but was a keen student of many other branches of scientific research, and a lover of belles lettres and the fine arts.*



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*With an almost unlimited field for original research in the domain of physiology (which was his first love) open to his intellectual activity, he developed, when the opportunity came to him, the same capacity and thoroughness in the administration of affairs, whether as a Medical Director in the Army, or as President of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of the University of New York.*

*His younger brother, your uncle, Doctor Edward, was quick in acquiring the essence of his text-books and keen in assimilating the science and practice of his profession, though he was not a student and scholar in the same sense as John. He was eminently a man of action. With his rare intellectual gifts, he had the power of gaining the confidence, respect and love of his associates in all walks of life, from his school days till his death. In the practice of his profession, in domestic life, and in hospital and military service, he was distinguished by a firm and gentle disposition, an*

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*instinctive sympathy for suffering, and an unwearied devotion to his responsibilities, especially apparent in his treatment of children.*

*In his four years service during the war, he developed capacity for the organization and administration of vast field hospitals on a scale never before attempted in any army, and also for the command of professional and military subordinates. These qualities were still further illustrated, after the war, in his service as chief executive officer of the Metropolitan Board of Health of New York City, his appointment to which post was made upon the advice of General Grant.*

*These varied gifts secured him the admiration and respect of all who met him, but it was the charm of his manner and voice, his high spirits, gaiety and courage, that gained their affectionate devotion.*

*I have had the good fortune of long and intimate friendships with several men who have added much to the happiness of my life, but the*

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*companionship of these two brothers was delightful and inspiring far above that of all others, and valued among my chief blessings.*

*To return to your earlier ancestor. Journeys in America in those days were made only for urgent reasons,—for pleasure rarely, and for the most part in the saddle. The roads were few and rough, and in winter and spring often almost impassable. It required three to four days to go from Boston to New York, and two to three weeks to Charleston, S. C. The women and children and most of the men were stay-at-homes. There was no running off to Paris, or even into the country, as nowadays. The only ones who got glimpses of the great world were the boys for whom the dangers and privations of the sea had no terrors, and who were lured by their imaginations to see the world beyond the horizon.*

*In 1736, at the age of eighteen, and in the two following years, young James sailed as supercargo to the southern ports of this country, to*



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*England and to the Continent, applying his theoretical seamanship on the stormy Atlantic.*

*As an evidence of the value of 'His Book' as a treatise on navigation, his son Peter, who was also a sailor in his early life, took it with him on his voyage thirty years later, making some additions to it, and writing on the title page, over his father's name, in a bold copper-plate hand—*

*London, January 24th, 1766*

*Pet. Roe Dalton.*

*I cannot tell you that your ancestor was in any way eminent or remarkable in his day and generation, that he achieved any extraordinary distinction among his fellow townsmen, or that he served the state in any high office. You have seen, however, that, as a youth, he was a keen student of the higher branches of mathematics, which, I think, implies that he had some brains in his head and the ambition to use them, that he was self-reliant and trustworthy, and could command a crew of*

sailors,—respectable qualities for a youngster to begin with.

Your uncle, Doctor John, who thoroughly examined and admirably arranged the papers relating to him and his affairs, describes him as ‘prudent, but energetic and successful in business, persevering, liberal and public-spirited, courteous to his associates and of a kindly disposition.’

In 1740, when twenty-two years old, he made his first voyage as captain, commanding the brigantine ‘Joshua,’ bound for London, a responsible post for so young a man. His orders from the owners of the ship were to ‘embrace the first wind and to make the best of your way for London, speaking no vessels in your passage, nor putting into any port if you can avoid it, and when, please God, you arrive in London you are to apply yourself to Messrs. Channing & Brent.’ ‘Also you will be careful of your rigging and sails, and frugal in your provisions, there being nothing gott without saving, and, as times are, frugality and

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*industry is the whole we can expect, and we doubt not off from you ( sic ), these things will always oblige us who are your friends &c.'*

*This command gave him his title of Captain, which he retained during life.*

*But shortly before he sailed on this voyage he ventured upon another one,—longer and of even graver responsibility,—by marrying ( as you can see in the Registry of the King's Chapel ) Mistress Abigail Alden, a young and fascinating widow of twenty-one years, whose first husband was Judar Alden, a grandson of John Alden of the Mayflower, who, as you have read, went a-courting as proxy for a bashful friend ; and Priscilla, tho' a prim Puritan maiden, not fancying a wooing at long range, hinted to John to speak for himself, which he did by giving her a smack on both cheeks, and so affronted her that she married him within a month. You may not believe the latter part of this old story,—I doubt it myself; happily there were no witnesses and it may*



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*not be true, though many queerer things, I am told, have happened in our own times; but I know you will make allowances for John under the trying circumstances, especially as the maid herself forgave him, if he really was guilty of such a heinous indiscretion. As a truthful historian I must tell you that he reformed, became a useful and honored citizen, and that he and Priscilla lived happily ever after.*

*As for Judar, Abigail's first husband, he sailed as captain of a ship bound for Scotland, and died on the voyage, about a year after his marriage, leaving no descendant; and Abigail, as you see, quickly consoled herself by marrying young James at about the end of her first year's widowhood, and thus became your great-great-grandmother. She had ten children and outlived her husband three years. Her daughter Mary married Benjamin Ingersoll; Ann married Nathaniel Tucker; and Sarah married John Homans, which accounts for the kinship between the families.*



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*After 1751, Captain Dalton, being thirty-three years old, went no more to sea; he had become a ship owner and merchant, sending his ships and cargoes to many foreign and domestic ports. When his eldest son, Peter Roe, your great-grandfather, was seventeen years old, he sent him to sea as supercargo and presently as captain; and afterwards his second son Richard, who, on his second and last voyage, shipped as supercargo in his father's brigantine 'Polly,' bound for various ports in the West Indies. In Captain James's letter of instructions to his skipper, James Scott, there is this 'N. B.,' which I do not find in any other similar letters, namely: 'If any accident should happen to my son Richard, as being sick or unable to do business, then you are to take the cargo in your own hands,' etc.*

*Richard was accidentally drowned on this voyage, at Turk's Island.*

*Though the boys received from their father many written instructions relating to ports and*

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*cargoes, much was left to their discretion. They were cautioned against taking on board any contraband goods, making the ship liable to seizure, but were reminded at the same time that the ship was armed with guns,—a hint that they could fight if they wanted to.*

*Young Peter's letters to his father, when away on his voyages, are models of formal commercial correspondence, in style and in beauty of penmanship. They begin with the address 'Honored Father,' and end, 'I remain with my most dutiful respects to my Honored Mother and love to sisters and brother—Honored Sir, your most dutiful and obedient son.'*

*These letters and documents, relating to ships, cargo, exchange, etc., indicate the thoroughness of the training which the boys of one hundred and fifty years ago received, to fit them for their professions, as well as the early age at which they were ready for the responsibilities of life; at about the time the youths of to-day are entering college,*

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*they sailed away from their homes, across the Atlantic, in small comfortless vessels of a few hundred tons, in charge of cargoes, and soon in command of the vessels and crews.*

*I have no doubt that these boys had their full share of fun and of competition with their fellows, and enjoyed themselves with the girls as heartily as any of the young folks of to-day ; but I feel sure that Captain James never felt prouder than when, at twenty-two, he sailed down Boston harbor, standing on the quarter deck, in command of the good brigantine 'Joshua,' bound for London. He reached the Isle of Wight in forty-five days, after a boisterous voyage.*

*When Captain James was thirty-eight years old, he had so prospered in his affairs that he decided to build a house for the better accommodation of his growing family, and so bought, from various owners, most of the land now bounded by 'Post Office Square, Water, Milk and Devonshire Streets, and occupied by the United States Post*



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*Office and Courts. On the northwest corner was the site of the Stackpole mansion. He pulled down the structures on his land and built upon it a mansion house and stable which were occupied by him for the rest of his life, and afterward by his son Peter, your great-grandfather. In this house your grandfather, John Call Dalton, was born. It probably was a good house for the period, three stories high, built partly of brick and partly of timber covered with stucco, with a garden or lawn on three sides. There is a correct picture of it on your book-plate. It faced what is now Post Office Square, and in the front yard were several elms and Lombardy poplars. Soon after it was built, Captain James induced the authorities to relocate and widen the street, he contributing the necessary lands, and to continue it to Kings, now State Street. This new street was called 'Dalton,' as appears on the old map of 1796 in the library, until 1800, when an ungrateful country changed it to 'Congress,' as it is still called.*

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*I have heard my father say that, when he was a boy, schooners came up to the dock, the wall of which made the other side of the street opposite the front yard, with their bowsprits reaching over the narrow street into the yard, and that he and his playfellows would board the sloops, crawl out on the bowsprits, and drop down into the yard.*

*The contents of this house were long ago scattered. I know of but one little relic—a Chippendale card table, now in the parlor. Its covering is a fine example of old fashioned hand-wrought embroidery, faded but still pretty, showing skill and patience. In the drawer is this record: ‘This table wrought in the year 1700 by Miss Polly Jenkins, aunt of Mr. Peter Roe Dalton Senior’s first wife.’ This date refers to the embroidery, the table itself being about one hundred and fifty years old.*

*The water front is now some half mile away to the east and the region is, as you know, occupied by streets lined with fine business structures. Gen-*



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*eral John C. Palfrey tells me that when his grandfather lived in Water Street, adjacent to the Dalton estate, his firewood was brought by a schooner and unloaded in front of the house.*

*When the mansion house estate was sold, a row of brick dwelling houses was built upon the front portion, which in time had been altered into business offices and warehouses. It so chanced that when I was placed in a counting house to learn the rudiments of business, it was in this brick block in the front yard of my great-grandfather's homestead that I found myself. Mr. Wigglesworth became the owner of the property, pulled down these brick structures, and built a fine granite business block in the best style of the period, with the title 'Dalton Block' in large raised granite letters on the front. These valuable buildings were in turn torn down to make room for the present imposing United States Post Office and Court House, before referred to. The lands of this old homestead are now valued at about three million dollars, and*

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*if the English laws of entail and primogeniture had attached to this property, your cousin Stella would now be quite an heiress.*

*In 1754, at the time of the rebuilding of the present beautiful King's Chapel, then the official Episcopal church, Captain James was a parish-ioner and proprietor of pew No. 53.*

*When the Revolution broke out, the Rector, Rev. Dr. Caner, like nearly all the Episcopal ministers, and of course the military and civil officers, in the country, was, naturally enough, a royalist. They had no sympathy with the patriotic aspirations of the people for independence, but acquiesced in all the iniquitous acts of George III against the rights of the Colonies. For them, the King could do no wrong. On March 17, 1776, Washington having occupied Dorchester Heights, the British forces suddenly evacuated Boston, embarked on their fleet and sailed for Halifax. The Episcopal clergy of the town and neighborhood, eighteen in all, were in a panic, and at a few hours'*

*notice, all deserted their flocks and joined the troops on the ships. The thrifty Dr. Caner, despite the eighth commandment, took with him all the King's Chapel communion service, the 'Dammask Linnen,' the Registry of Marriages and Vestry Records,—in short, all the portable property he could lay his hands on. Safely reaching Halifax, the pious doctor wrote in the Registry of Marriages his parting shot, as follows:—‘The unnatural Rebellion of the Colonies against his Majesties Government obliged the Loyal Part of his subjects to evacuate their Dwellings and Substance and to take refuge in Halifax, London and elsewhere. By which means the Public Worship at King's Chapel became suspended and is like to remain so till it shall please God in the course of his Providence to change the hearts of the Rebels, or give success to his Majesties Arms for suppressing the Rebellion. Two boxes of Church Plate and a silver christening Basin were left in the hands of the Rev. Dr. Breynton at Halifax to be delivered*



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*to me or my order, agreeably to his note 'Receipt in my hands. H. Caner.'*

*This historic communion service, of forty-two pieces, the gift of three kings, was of value to the church far beyond its worth as old silver.*

*After peace was declared great efforts were made to recover it, but the doctor, who then lived in England, refused to return it, giving as a reason that his goods which he left in Boston were confiscated. His heirs, however, had the grace to send back the Registry of Marriages, containing his blank cartridge, but the silver has not yet been received. When the parson fled the country there were seventy-three proprietors of King's Chapel; thirty of these, being royalists, left the church, forty-three, being patriots, remained. I am glad to tell you that your great-great-grandfather was one of the latter.*

*The rebel parishioners, having thus lost their silverware and spiritual guide, crossed out from their book of Common Prayer all mention of the*



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*King and Royal Family, leaving them to their fate, so the service was no longer that of the Established Church of England, and the Chapel became, in time, an independent Unitarian church, with an expurgated Book of Common Prayer, as it is to-day. Should any of you young folks backslide from the good Unitarian faith in which you were brought up, and find yourselves within the Episcopal fold, you can with truth say that you have only returned to the church of your forefathers.*

*Perhaps you will be surprised, and possibly scandalized, to learn that Captain James was a slaveholder, but I must tell you the truth at any cost to your sensibilities.*

*It was then the custom of many Boston families to own their negro household and personal servants. I find among Captain James's papers sundry deeds of the purchase and sale of slaves, drawn on printed legal forms very similar to those used in the transfer of real estate.*

*For example, he bought James Brown's negro*

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man 'Lys,' twenty-five years old, for 45 pounds; Gideon Thayer's slave boy 'Caesar' for 34 pounds (the witnesses to this deed are his wife Abigail and his daughter Mary); Wm. White's negro 'Peter,' aged twenty-seven, to be, the deed says, 'his slave for life'; and Elizabeth Palfrey's negro boy 'Bob,' fifteen years old, for 13 pounds, 6 shillings, 8 pence. Miss Palfrey was an ancestress of General Palfrey. The captain exchanged his negro boy 'Prince,' for Ezekiel Lewis's boy 'Pompey,' thus getting an emperor for a prince. A man in those days bought a slave just as he would a horse if he was in want of either article.

Negro slaves were first brought into this continent from Spain about the year 1500, to work in the Mexican mines. A century later the English and Dutch colonies in Virginia and New Amsterdam began buying negroes. Slavery existed in the Province of Massachusetts in 1638, and lasted, in a mild form, till about the end of the eighteenth century, by which time it had grad-

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ually died out. *Many laws had been enacted regulating the importation and treatment of slaves, recognizing the slave trade as a legitimate business. Contrary to popular belief, Massachusetts, even after independence, never abolished slavery by act of the Legislature. Bills were introduced from time to time to accomplish this, but always failed to become law. The reasons for this non-action were not due to any proslavery sentiments, for a very small portion of the community had any direct interest in the institution, and the slaves numbered less than ten per cent. of the population of Boston—where most of them were owned; but it was feared, and with good reason, that if freed by law, all the old, feeble, and lazy blacks would become paupers, to be supported by the towns, and thus relieve the former owners from their responsibility. A master could not by freeing his slaves himself escape this responsibility.*

*In my early days in Boston there was a well-known aged white-haired darkey waiter, employed*



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*at private parties, named Dalton, with whom, by reason of our common name, I was on friendly terms; he has found me a bottle of champagne even after it had all gone—for others. It is not unlikely that this old trained house servant may have been a descendant of the good captain's slaves.*

*And now comes the last and most interesting part of my story.*

*During the occupation of Boston by King George's troops, and its investment by the Continental Army, under Washington, in the winter of 1775-6, the British soldiers demolished one church, many private buildings, fences, etc., using the materials for fuel. Among the victims was Captain James. There is in my possession a document dated 1775, entitled 'An Account of the Damages James Dalton has Suffered by the Kings Troops,' giving an itemized schedule of his properties taken, amounting to several hundreds of pounds. When peace was declared he made demand for compensation for these damages. I do*



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*not find that this righteous claim has ever been settled. Undoubtedly it is as good an asset to-day as ever, and will amount with interest to several millions of dollars.*

*In view of these promising conditions your Aunt Mary and I, for, and in consideration of, our affection for you, have decided to, and do now, by these presents, jointly and severally, give, grant, convey and make over to you and your cousin Viva, in equal shares, as a Christmas gift, all our right, title and interest in and to this ancestral fortune, to have, to hold and to enjoy the same, in perpetuity; which gift, with your own shares, will give to each of you several hundreds of thousands, and you have our best wishes of the season for its speedy collection and enjoyment.*

C. D.

33 COMMONWEALTH AVENUE

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS



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